

Norman B. Rice
President and Chief Executive Officer

May 14, 2004

Seattle City Council Members
City Hall
600 4th Avenue, Floor 2
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Dear Council President  and Members of the Council:

I am writing today in support of Mayor Greg Nickel's proposed Families and Education Levy package. Unfortunately, I cannot attend your May 19 public hearing but I wanted to provide you with my strong endorsement via this letter.

When I proposed the first Families and Education Levy early in my first term as mayor, our goal was to improve student achievement. We approached it differently then — the first levy freed up school district funding in order to reduce class size — but the goal was the same: reduce the achievement gap by helping students become ready to learn. My intentions were then, as Mayor Nickels' are now, to provide proven and effective programs that improve students' chances for academic success.

The new package reflects changes driven by the experience gained over the first two levies: programs are more effective when they focus on academic achievement with measurable outcomes and when they integrate levy-funded services with other resources offered in the community. Make no mistake, the levy is not intended to supplant the function of the Seattle Public Schools. The School District is clearly responsible first and foremost for educating our children but we know they cannot do it in isolation. This levy proposal supports the school district's stated mission of closing the academic achievement gap by providing an integrated system of programs and services to those who need them most.

Despite the efforts of the first two Families and Education levies and the school district, only two out of three of all students graduate and only one in two students of color graduates. We all know the cost to these kids: landing in the juvenile justice system, being locked out of an education, and missing a chance to develop the skills they need to find good jobs.

We all need to try harder — the School District, the City, our community partners. It is appropriate to direct our tax dollars to those children most in need and commit to the responsibility of making sure they succeed.

A tremendous amount of hard work and good community process went into developing this package. It's creative and innovative, and it makes some difficult choices based on the input of more than 2,500 people, representing a broad cross-section of parents, educators, youth and community leaders. These dedicated people concluded the status quo was not working. If all of our children were doing equally well in school, perhaps no changes would be

needed from previous levies. Unfortunately, that is simply not the case. Change is needed because it is clear so many children — particularly children of color — are not getting their needs adequately addressed in school. In order to help these kids, we must make appropriate changes to the part of the equation the City can effect: the Families and Education Levy.

A change in direction naturally raises questions and criticisms, which must be considered by the Council. But as you move this measure forward, please put children first. The status quo approach is failing Seattle's children. We must move in a new direction, and the mayor's proposal sets the right direction for Seattle's children and their families.

Sincerely,



Norman B. Rice
President & Chief Executive Officer

P.S. Call me if you need further elaboration!